



Educating Vulnerable Learners in Today's Climate

2025 SPRING INSTITUTE

Adult Education Conference

Thursday, May 29th, 2025

9:30 AM – 4 PM

Parkway Central Library, 4th Floor
1901 Vine Street, 19103



Free
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Mayor's Office of
Education

2025 Spring Institute: Educating Vulnerable Adult Learners in Today's Climate

Free Library of Philadelphia, Parkway Central, Skyline Room, 4th Floor

Program

Schedule

9:30 – 9:55	Registration and Welcoming Remarks
9:55 – 10:35	Panel – Federal Impact on Adult Education Provision in Philadelphia
Skyline	Join us as Philadelphia's three state-funded adult education providers (Beyond Literacy, District 1199C, and Temple University) discuss how they've navigated recent federal policy shifts, balanced safety concerns with inclusive learning environments, and reimagined service delivery to maintain effective programming during uncertain times.
10:40 – 11:50	Session 1 Workshops
Skyline	Think, Question, Verify: Empowering Adult Learners through Cognitive Flexibility, Digital Literacy, and Self-Advocacy to Counter Misinformation and Disinformation
405	Adult ESL Feedback Loop: Learner-Centered Curricula in Periods of Chaos
407	From the Classroom to the Courtroom: Empowering Immigrant Advocacy Through Education
11:55 – 1:05	Lunch and Philadelphia Adult Literacy Alliance Discussion
1:10 – 2:20	Session 2 Workshops
Skyline	Engaging with News and Online Information with Adult Learners
405	Best Practices in Adult Education Behind and Beyond the Bars - A Student Perspective
407	Developing Tools to Incorporate Civic Education in Adult Education for Today's Climate and Beyond
2:25 – 3:35	Session 3 Workshops
Skyline	Trauma-Informed Classroom Environments for Adult Education Inside and Out
405	Pathway Program in Review: Successes and Challenges from the Pilot Year
407	Empowering Immigrant and Refugee Learners: A Replicable ESL Health Literacy Model to Improve Healthcare Access
3:35 – 4:00	Networking

Thanks to Our Generous Book Sponsors!



Speakers

Welcoming Remarks: Dr. Debora Carrera, Chief Education Officer, City of Philadelphia



Dr. Debora Carrera, the City's Chief Education Officer, served the School District of Philadelphia for over 27 years, rising from teacher to principal to Assistant Superintendent. She is charged with leading and implementing Mayor Parker's education vision and agenda, which includes year-round education opportunities for children, meaningful out-of-school time programs, preparing a strategy for school building modernization in concert with the School District, facilitating outreach to teachers, counselors and principals, and assisting the process of recruiting applicants to serve on the School Board.

Federal Impact on Adult Education Provision in Philadelphia Panelists

Join us as Philadelphia's three state-funded adult education providers (Beyond Literacy, District 1199C, and Temple University) discuss how they've navigated recent federal policy shifts, balanced safety concerns with inclusive learning environments, and reimagined service delivery to maintain effective programming during uncertain times.



Dawn Hannah is a dedicated education leader with 25+ years in the field. As Chief Program and Impact Officer at Beyond Literacy, she champions equity, skills development, and community collaboration. A Georgetown and Stanford graduate, she's committed to expanding access to transformative, high-quality education for all learners.



Mike Boesz is the Adult Education Program Manager at District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund. His journey in adult education began as a University of Pennsylvania intern in 2016 while pursuing a master's in social work. Mike has since advanced through roles, committed to enhancing adult learners' success and educational opportunities.



Shirley Moy, MSW, is the Executive Director of the Lenfest Center for Community Workforce Partners at Temple University, under the Office of the Vice President for Community Impact and Civic Engagement. The Center offers education, workforce, and community-development programs, including a Title II adult literacy program, funded by the PA Department of Education.

Session 1 Workshops - 10:40 – 11:50

<p>Think, Question, Verify: Empowering Adult Learners through Cognitive Flexibility, Digital Literacy, and Self-Advocacy to Counter Misinformation and Disinformation. -- This interactive learning experience equips participants with cognitive flexibility, digital literacy, and self-advocacy strategies to critically evaluate information, strengthen strategic planning and apply collaboration skills to manage stress, make informed decisions, and counter misinformation and disinformation.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop critical thinking skills to evaluate sources of information, recognize bias, and apply strategies to differentiate between misinformation and credible content. • Enhance digital literacy by employing fact-checking techniques, using trusted feedback strategies, and confidently challenging misinformation in personal and professional settings. • Build resilience and collaboration skills through stress management, breathing techniques, and adaptive mindsets. 	<p>Skyline Room</p>
<p>Adult ESL Feedback Loop: Learner-Centered Curricula in Periods of Chaos -- This presentation will combine theory, review of practical tools, and hands-on workshoping to develop and fine-tune adult ESL lessons and curricula for learners whose lives are in flux.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly explain the difference between a needs analysis, an environmental analysis, and a formative assessment, and the benefits of each for instruction planning. • Adapt template needs questionnaires, environmental analyses and formative assessments for use in your own teaching contexts. • Analyze the results of assessments to derive practical and implementable changes to curriculum and/or instruction. • identify at least one barrier your students are experiencing now and align it with a literacy skill to address with instruction. 	<p>Room 405</p>
<p>From the Classroom to the Courtroom: Empowering Immigrant Advocacy Through Education -- This presentation will introduce Villanova’s Interdisciplinary Immigration Studies Training for Advocates, highlight how the content learned directly supports immigrant-serving organizations, and offer ways to leverage the VIISTA community.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how interdisciplinary immigration advocacy training can be applied in real-world, community-based settings to support immigrants and refugees. • Identify ways to expand access to resources and support for immigrant learners. • Identify ways to leverage professional networks and training communities to expand access to resources and support for immigrant learners. 	<p>Room 407</p>

Session 2 Workshops - 1:10 – 2:20

<p>Engaging with News and Online Information with Adult Learners -- Learn more about best practices in news literacy and information literacy to foster discussions with adult learners about sensitive topics related to information they may find online.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster thoughtful and engaging conversations with adult learners around complex topics. • Develop skills for finding and analyzing online content about current events and issues. • Model habits of information literacy to support critical thinking about news and media. 	<p>Skyline Room</p>
<p>Best Practices in Adult Education Behind and Beyond the Bars - A Student Perspective -- The Petey Greene Program shares how they facilitate volunteer tutoring programs in the Philadelphia region to support the academic and career goals of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how involvement with the criminal legal system impacts the needs of current and formerly incarcerated adult learners and identify the unique challenges they face. • Determine what additional educational services and resources are most effective in supporting adult learners who are currently and formerly incarcerated. • Incorporate educational services, resources, and strategies to best support current and formerly incarcerated adult learners. 	<p>Room 405</p>
<p>Developing Tools to Incorporate Civic Education in Adult Education for Today's Climate and Beyond -- This session explores strategies for incorporating civic education into adult education classes to develop learners' critical thinking skills and knowledge of current events contextualized by long-standing systemic oppression.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically think about the possibilities of adult education as a space for the civic education of educators and learners that today's climate demands. • Identify professional development and civic education spaces as opportunities to prepare adult educators for educating vulnerable learners. • Equip ourselves with resources, considerations, facilitation guidance, and best practices for designing accessible materials for teaching civic education with vulnerable learners across backgrounds and literacy levels. 	<p>Room 407</p>

Session 3 Workshops - 2:25 – 3:35

<p>Trauma-Informed Classroom Environments for Adult Education Inside and Out -- This presentation will equip adult education instructors, non-profits, and institutions with the knowledge and tools to create trauma-informed, culturally relevant classroom environments that support adult learners' emotional and academic growth, particularly in correctional settings.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become familiarized with the impact of trauma on adult learners in and out of correctional settings, highlighting how trauma-informed practices can support emotional and academic growth. • Learn best practices for creating trauma-informed classroom environments that are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of adult learners in and out of prisons. • Explore the importance of collaboration between educators, non-profits, and institutions in creating supportive educational spaces that promote healing and empowerment. 	<p>Skyline Room</p>
<p>Pathway Program in Review: Successes and Challenges from the Pilot Year -- This session explores the development and rollout of the Pathway Program, highlighting key successes, reflecting on the challenges faced during its first year, and offering a look at what's ahead in year two.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the development and content of the Pathway Program. • Evaluate successes and challenges from the first year. • Identify candidates from within your network for this program. 	<p>Room 405</p>
<p>Empowering Immigrant and Refugee Learners: A Replicable ESL Health Literacy Model to Improve Healthcare Access -- Join us to explore an interactive ESL Health Literacy model that helps empower immigrant and refugee learners to overcome healthcare barriers through ESL instruction, health lectures, and digital literacy skill-building.</p> <p>Participant Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a step-by-step plan to implement an online ESL Health Literacy series in your own community context. • Identify at least three strategies for attracting, recruiting, and engaging vulnerable adult learners to participate in online ESL Health Literacy sessions. • Outline three digital literacy integration strategies to help ESL learners navigate patient portals, telehealth, and digital health resources. 	<p>Room 407</p>

Meet Your Facilitators!

Adult ESL Feedback Loop: Learner-Centered Curricula in Periods of Chaos



Lily Applebaum is the Lead Adult ESL Instructor at District 1199C. Lily specializes in beginner/low-literacy instruction and curriculum development. She has presented at the Spring Institute and PAACE. She has a BA in English/Environmental Studies (UPenn, 2012); and is pursuing an M.S.Ed. in TESOL at Temple University.

Best Practices in Adult Education Behind and Beyond the Bars - A Student Perspective



Kaya Ceci, LMSW implements trauma-informed programs helping marginalized individuals achieve education and employment goals. At PGP, she manages volunteer-based carceral education across Greater Philadelphia. With over a decade of experience, Kaya focuses on communities affected by systemic inequities, disrupting intergenerational harm through advocacy, clinical intervention, and trauma-responsive programming.



Fiona Flynn, Philadelphia Division Manager at PGP since 2023, previously served as AmeriCorps Volunteer Coordinator. Her passion for education justice began while tutoring at SCI Chester during her Haverford College years. She now supports Philadelphia-area jails, prisons, and reentry programs by recruiting, placing, and supporting volunteer tutors throughout the city.



Roberto Gonzalez Jr., a public speaker and Prison Education Programs consultant, is pursuing his bachelor's at Eastern University. Sentenced to life at 17, he was resentenced following a 2012 Supreme Court ruling. In 2024, he graduated as valedictorian with an Associate's Degree from Eastern University's Prison Education Program before his release.

Developing Tools to Incorporate Civic Education in Adult Education for Today's Climate and Beyond



Sacharja Cunningham holds a BA in Africana Studies from Hamilton College and an M.S.Ed. in Reading, Writing, and Literacy from Penn GSE (2023). They teach adult education at the Free Library of Philadelphia and CCP, plus civics at College Unbound. In terms of organizing, Sacharja is active with the Black Philadelphians Descendant Community Group and a supporting member of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement's Philly Chapter.

Empowering Immigrant and Refugee Learners: A Replicable ESL Health Literacy Model to Improve Healthcare Access



Michele Porter volunteers for the ESL Health Talks Series, bringing over 26 years of education experience in K-12, university settings, and teaching English in Sweden. She helped launch Temple Teacher Residency, a program preparing teachers for Philadelphia schools. Inspired by her immigrant experience, Michele supports adult language acquisition. She holds a PhD (University of Missouri) and an EdM (Harvard) in Education.



Jeanine Campbell coordinates and instructs the ESL Health Talks Series and has taught adult ESOL and digital literacy across Philadelphia and internationally for over three years. Currently, she is an adult ESL instructor at AFAHO. Passionate about community education and health literacy, Jeanine holds a BA in English Literature/Women's Studies from Rutgers University, a CELTA certification, and an MBA in Health Administration from Eastern University.

Engaging with News and Online Information with Adult Learners



David Cooper Moore is a digital literacy scholar, practitioner, and consultant, and founder of Media Education Consulting. He works with Philadelphia agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations to support digital equity and inclusion efforts, and provides professional development in media and digital literacy education.

From the Classroom to the Courtroom: Empowering Immigrant Advocacy Through Education



Melanie Menkevich is Executive Director of Immaculate Heart of Mary Center for Literacy, supporting immigrant inclusion through English, computer, workforce, and citizenship education. A TESOL-certified instructor with 15 years in Philadelphia adult education, she's taught internationally. Melanie holds an MPA and nonprofit certificate from Villanova and is pursuing VIISTA accreditation.



Michele Pistone is a law professor and founder/director of the Strategic Initiative for Migrants + Refugees and VIISTA. She established Villanova Law's Clinical Program and directed CARES (1999-2019). Pistone has taught at Georgetown, American University, and served as a Fulbright Scholar at University of Malta.

Pathway Program in Review: Successes and Challenges from the Pilot Year



Gretchen Spencer is the Manager of Adult and Community Education at the Community College of Philadelphia, supporting over 800 students each year. She has an M.S.Ed. in TESOL from Temple University and has given multiple presentations on student retention, career paths for adult educators, and ELL access to legal rights.



Charles Heil is the Professional Development and Training Manager for Adult Education Philadelphia. With 20+ years in the field, he designs and coordinates accessible, equitable programming for adult educators to strengthen instructional quality, build capacity, and promote learner success.

Think, Question, Verify: Empowering Adult Learners through Cognitive Flexibility, Digital Literacy and Self-Advocacy to counter Misinformation and Disinformation



Joanna L. Jenkins, Ph.D. is an educator, curriculum developer, and certified coach with 20+ years experience across education sectors. The Philadelphia Girls High and Howard University alumna authored "The Convergence Crisis" and speaks on media literacy and workplace equity. She specializes in professional development that empowers historically excluded groups through strategic communication and inclusive practices.

Trauma-Informed Classroom Environments for Adult Education Inside and Out



Micah L. Wilson holds a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from Lincoln University. With over a decade of experience spanning from Pre-K to high school, Micah serves as the Correctional Education Director for the Philadelphia Department of Prisons. Additionally, Micah consults for Common Unity Consultants.